Comfort Play &Teach

Parental Influence on Child Outcomes

As a parent, you play a vital role in your child's development. During the early years your relationship with your child and the experiences you provide will be the most influential during a period of rapid growth and development. What you do, and how you respond to your child can affect the way your child thinks, acts, and learns. Here are tips on how to connect with your child in the early years to contribute to positive developmental outcomes.

Attachment:

Respond to your child's distress in a comforting way. Early on, a child's relationship with his parent (or primary caregiver) is the most important. Through this relationship a child begins to build trust when he knows that this person will respond to his needs consistently and appropriately, especially when he is distressed. Responding in a nurturing and comforting way creates a secure attachment which will influence how he approaches various opportunities and relationships and how he responds to and copes with challenges.

Social interactions and experiences:

Expose your child to people and experiences. A child's development is dependent on relationships and the interactions these relationships bring. The interactions she has with the world around her influence her development at a biological level and last for a lifetime. More than that, the activities and experiences you provide for your child in the short- and long-term help to shape developmental outcomes. Something as simple as a trip to the library or more complex, like a camping trip, can help her to make decisions about herself and her world, which influence her development.

Comfort

Your child depends on you for comfort and support in all things. You are building a strong relationship when your child can rely on you to always have his safety and best interest at heart.

Play

Positive reinforcement and patience while trying new things will encourage your child to practice and build and use his unique skills and talents.

Teach

Young children need to be free to play, learn and make mistakes but as they grow they also need guidance, structure, and support. Follow your child's cues and offer support and guidance when needed.

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Your Mental Health:

Be emotionally available to your child. Several different aspects of your mental health, such as emotional availability, parenting style and the goodness of fit with your child influences the trajectory of her development. Parenting classes, such as those provided by Ontario Early Years Centres, can help you build on your strengths as a parent and find new ways of engaging with your child. Emotional and behavioural regulation comes when you are emotionally available for your child, and you respond to and soothe him when he is in distress. This helps him to be able to comfort himself later.

Temperament and Goodness of Fit:

Know and accommodate your child's temperament. Your temperament helps to determine the goodness of fit with your child. Temperament is a set of traits that organize the child's approach to the world. Everyone is born with these traits, though they differ from person to person. These traits also determine how the child goes about learning about the world around her. If you can recognize temperamental characteristics and accommodate to your child's uniqueness, you can better promote growth. When the demands and expectations of people and the environment work well with your child's temperament, this reflects a "goodness-of-fit" between parent temperament and child temperament, which promotes attachment.

Parenting Style:

Be fair, but firm. Research has shown that the best parenting style is fair, but firm, such as allowing your child some independence while maintaining specific boundaries in comparison to a permissive or overbearing parenting style that is more likely to lead to challenges and negatively impact development. A positive parenting style can help a child establish a healthy personality and developmental outcomes.

Infant Mental Health Promotion
IMHP